

Public letter from National Strategy Advisory Group members

An open letter to the Australian Government and the Australian community

Child sexual abuse remains one of the most serious and enduring harms facing Australia. Evidence shows it affects millions of people across generations, with lifelong consequences for mental and physical health, wellbeing, participation and productivity. This is not a problem of the past. The nature of abuse has changed, risks have intensified, and too many victim survivors do not have access to timely, affordable, culturally safe and appropriate trauma informed support.

As members of the National Strategy Advisory Group, established to advise on the implementation of the National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse, we are calling for urgent and sustained national leadership through the Second Action Plan.

The First Action Plan has delivered important foundations, including greater community awareness, stronger online safety mechanisms, and progress toward nationally consistent child safe practices. But the challenge is changing over time and becoming more urgent with the increasing sophistication of predatory behaviours, requiring sustained attention and investment. Online-facilitated abuse has escalated, harmful sexual behaviours by children and young people are increasing, and abuse occurring within families and close relationships continues to account for most harm and remains insufficiently addressed. Victim-survivors continue to fall through gaps between Commonwealth and state systems, often at moments of greatest need. Evidence consistently shows significantly elevated risks of mental ill-health, self-harm and suicide among victim-survivors.

For families, this investment means something very practical. When a child discloses abuse, they should be supported early, in one safe place, without being passed from service to service or asked to repeatedly relive their experience. Early, coordinated responses reduce long-term harm for children and families and avoid years of costly, crisis-driven intervention. This is a system designed to work early, rather than one that pays repeatedly for failure later. Recent events in the childcare sector have shown how quickly governments can act when serious risks to children become visible. The challenge is applying that same urgency earlier, before harm occurs.

The impacts of child sexual abuse do not end in childhood. They shape health, relationships, education and workforce participation across an entire lifetime. The Second Action Plan is therefore a critical opportunity to shift from fragmented responses to coordinated, evidence-informed action. It must be resourced at a scale proportionate to the problem.

This letter highlights the system-level priorities that determine whether children are protected, whether victim-survivors are supported across their lives, and whether governments are investing in prevention and recovery rather than bearing the long-term costs of inaction. These priorities reflect the real experiences of children, families and victim-survivors across Australia.

We know that progress is possible. Where governments have invested in integrated services, early intervention, culturally safe practice and lived-experience leadership, outcomes improve. The Second Action Plan can embed and scale what works.

We are calling on the Australian Government to commit to a substantial, multi-year investment through the Second Action Plan, and to provide clear and bold national leadership so that no child, and no victim-survivor, is left without support when they reach out for help. This level of investment reflects the scale of harm, the lifetime costs of inaction, and the opportunity to use public funds more effectively through earlier, better-designed responses.

As a nation, we need to demonstrate our genuine commitment to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child which declares that children must be protected from violence, exploitation and sexual abuse.

Australians expect a system that protects children, responds early, and supports recovery across the lifespan. With the right investment and leadership, this is achievable.

Signed

National Strategy Advisory Group Members

Professor Leah Bromfield (Co-Chair)
Deb Tsorbaris (former Co-Chair)
Aimee Hele
Alison Quigley
Amanda Morgan
Bob Atkinson AO APM
Bruce Morcombe OAM and Denise Morcombe OAM
Catherine Liddle
Christabel Chamarette
Hetty Johnston AM GAICD
Jade Woods
Dr Janine Bush
Kathryn Fordyce
Louise Lamont
Mary Karras
Matilda Alexander
Miranda Bain
Professor Patrick O'Leary

Phil Doorgachurn
Shelley Henāre
Sonia Regan
Sonya Ryan OAM
Anne Hollonds AO (former Special Advisor)